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Summary:

Although I favored legalized abortion, I experienced an intense negative emotional reaction after having one. My emotional reaction lasted for several years and included an eating disorder, depression, intense anger, profound sadness, loss of appetite, fatigue and suicidal ideation.

I was eventually able to overcome these difficulties with the help of counselors and supportive friends that allowed me to enter into a healthy grieving process.

My abortion has also had a negative impact on other family members.

Planned Parenthood claims that 1 out of 4 women of childbearing years in the United States have had at least one abortion. Although abortion has touched many of us, we rarely share our personal experiences. Shame or guilt may play a role in secreting our abortions. The rancorous public debate certainly doesn't encourage dialogue about this personal and extremely sensitive topic. We also lack the language to discuss the conflicted emotions that trouble us. Whatever the reason, silence perpetuates the myth that we stand alone in our abortion experiences or at least that we're alone in the emotional debris.

It is normal to grieve after a pregnancy loss whether the loss is caused by a miscarriage, stillbirth, adoption, infertility or an abortion. An important part of grieving is talking, but many women aren't able to talk about their abortion experience either because the abortion is a secret or those closest to her do not want to listen. With no safe place to deal with her emotions, she may need to repress or numb them in order to cope.

This repressed grief can lead to prolonged feelings of sadness, nightmares, loss of self-esteem, eating disorders, substance abuse, destructive relationships, an inability to bond with future children or even attempted and completed suicides. If the abortion loss is followed by additional pregnancies losses such as a miscarriage or infertility, the multiple losses will only increase the inner chaos and pain.

Although some women are able to move on from their abortion, many are left with physical or emotional scars that negatively affect their lives for years and sometimes decades.

In all the noise surrounding abortion, women are often forgotten. It is time to stop the noise and start listening to women who have experienced abortion and other pregnancy losses.

Mr. Chairman, good afternoon; my name is Michaelene Fredenburg, I am the President of Life Perspectives, and I live in San Diego, California. I am grateful that you are considering H.R. 20, as it is a critical to study and treat post-partum depression. I am also grateful for the opportunity to testify before this Committee today.

As a teenager, I assumed legalized abortion was necessary for women to attain their educational and career goals. So it's not surprising that when I became pregnant at 18, I thought about having an abortion. I also considered adoption.

My 28-year-old live-in boyfriend was furious when he discovered I was pregnant. He immediately demanded that I have an abortion or he would kick me out. I turned to my employer for advice. After I told her about my situation, she recommended abortion. She said it was the only logical option and offered to arrange one for me.

My experience at the abortion clinic was painful and humiliating—nothing like I'd imagined when I defended a woman's "right to choose." Although the young women awaiting their abortions were anxious and tearful, the clinic staff was cold and aloof. I met briefly with a "counselor" who characterized my eight-week pregnancy as a "couple of cells" and the "products of conception."

As I lay alone in the procedure room, I could hear footsteps move down the hall and turn into a room. This was repeated several times, each time the footsteps were louder and closer. My anxiety steadily built and then peaked when the abortion provider and her assistant entered the

room. I began to have second thoughts, and I asked the assistant if I could have a few minutes. The doctor yelled, “Shut her up!” and started the suction machine.

It was not an empowering experience. I felt violated and betrayed.

I was completely unprepared for the emotional fallout after the abortion. I thought the abortion would erase the pregnancy. I thought I could move on with my life. I was wrong. Although I didn't feel this way before the procedure, it was now clear to me that the abortion ended the life of my child.

The mere presence of my boyfriend caused deep hurt and pain. I found it difficult to work. I soon found myself in a cycle of self-destructive behavior that included an eating disorder.

Desperate for a fresh start, I broke up with my boyfriend, quit my job, and moved from Minnesota to Hawaii. Although Hawaii was breathtakingly beautiful and bursting with life, I felt dead inside. It didn't take long for me to realize I couldn't escape from myself.

I experienced periods of intense anger followed by periods of profound sadness. For weeks and sometimes months at a time, I was too fatigued to do more than eat a meal and shower during the day. I lost interest in food, and my weight fell dangerously low. There were also periods when I seemed able to pull myself together and lead a normal life—at least outwardly.

I saw a number of doctors for the fatigue and weight loss. They tested me for everything from lupus to cancer to AIDS. I didn't tell them about the feelings I was having as a result of the abortion. I didn't see a connection between the abortion and my current physical symptoms. This continued for the next few years until suicidal thoughts began to scare me. That's when I finally went to see a therapist.

With the help of counselors and supportive friends, my time of self-condemnation and self-punishment came to an end. I was finally able to enter into a healthy grieving process.

In addition to grieving the loss of my child, I slowly became aware of how my choice to abort had impacted my family. A choice they only learned about when I decided to go public with my experience.

Although I repeatedly assured my parents that I never doubted their willingness to provide support and assistance if I'd decided to carry the baby to term, they still believed that somehow they'd failed me and they were at least partly responsible for the death of their grandchild. When I first told my sister, she cried and said she wished she didn't know about the niece or nephew who was missing.

My oldest son found out when he was quite young, and he still struggles with the loss of a sibling and the reality that his mother was the cause of the loss. My youngest son hasn't been told yet. It breaks my heart that one day he'll also have to deal with a loss that I inflicted.

In addition to coping with the fallout that my abortion has caused in my family, there are still times that are painful for me. After all, healing doesn't mean forgetting. Mother's Day is particularly difficult. The year my child would have graduated from high school was also filled with pain.

If my child had gone to college, she would have graduated this year. This child would now be a young woman with gifts and abilities, hopes and dreams...her whole life ahead of her. There will always be a hole in my heart—a hole in the fabric of our family and our community.

Over the years I've heard many heartrending stories about abortion. Although each story is unique, a common thread moves through them all—*abortion changes you*. Yet, there is no forum in place to help abortion participants and those closest to them explore this tragic truth.

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It is normal to grieve after a pregnancy loss whether the loss is caused by a miscarriage, stillbirth, adoption, infertility or an abortion. Most of us know someone who has suffered the loss

of a child through miscarriage. The loss in an abortion is similar except for two important factors: the woman opted for the abortion, many times succumbing to pressure from others, and the abortion is often kept a secret. An important part of grieving is talking. Since an abortion is typically a secret, it is more difficult to talk about it.

Even when she does want to talk about the abortion experience, her efforts are often met with resistance. Her partner typically doesn't want to talk about it. Well-meaning family and friends may try to "help" her by encouraging her to move on with her life and forget about the abortion. She may fear that pro-life individuals will condemn her and pro-choice individuals deny her feelings. With no safe place to deal with her emotions, she may need to repress or numb them in order to cope.

This repressed grief can lead to prolonged feelings of sadness, nightmares, loss of self-esteem, eating disorders, substance abuse, destructive relationships, an inability to bond with future children or even attempted and completed suicides. If the abortion loss is followed by additional pregnancies losses such as a miscarriage or infertility, the multiple losses will only increase the inner chaos and pain.

Although some women are able to move on from their abortion, many are left with physical or emotional scars that negatively affect their lives for years and sometimes decades.

In all the noise surrounding abortion, women are often forgotten. It is time to stop the noise and start listening to women who have experienced pregnancy losses. I am grateful that you have

taken the time to listen and I urge you to continue to take steps to understand the impact abortion and other pregnancy losses have on women.